

# Sarah Ricardo's Tale of Wealth and Virtue

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**Abstract:** The paper reconstructs the life and activity of the author of a famous novel for boys as well as of a textbook of arithmetic and of essays on educational issues, who was also the sister of a famous economist. The bulk of the paper is dedicated to *Alfred Dudley*, a novel for boys about wealth, status, speculation, poverty, manual work, emigration and the role of virtue in making a decent society possible. Also the author's educational views are discussed, highlighting her opposition to Benthamite programs and her proposal for an inter-denominational religious education, and arguing that her contributions to plans for a general education system were meant to respond to what had been Smith's, Malthus's, and perhaps also her brother's question, namely, how may wealth and virtue go together?

## 1 Introduction: The Life of a Nineteenth-Century Literary Lady

Sarah Ricardo Porter, or, allowing for increasing doses of male chauvinism, Sarah Porter née Ricardo, Sarah Porter or Mrs G.R. Porter, was the youngest daughter of Abraham Ricardo. The latter had married Abigail Delvalle in 1769 and they had a huge family, even by eighteenth-century standards, of fifteen children (Sraffa 1955: 24). Sarah was born on 22 December 1790, twenty years after her famous brother, David Ricardo (*ibid*: 60). Her father was a man of considerable wealth and on his death left a fortune of £45,000. It is of interest that a letter written in Sarah's handwriting and signed jointly with Esther, her sister, refusing a present in money from David has been preserved. It may date from some time after Abraham Ricardo's death in 1812 and before Sarah's marriage in 1814. The reason why David felt he had to offer some financial help was that Abraham had established that the younger children's share should be left in trust until they came of age or married, and as a consequence Sarah and Esther had an annual allowance of only £90 each to rely upon. The reasons for refusal, besides the opinion that they did not really need any more money, was an awareness of the undesirable side-effects of the gift relationship, 'for while one party is constantly receiving obligations from the other, there certainly cannot subsist that perfect equality so necessary to the unrestrained affection we at present feel towards each other' (Ricardo 1951-73, 10: 133). No information about the kind of education she received is available, and we may only guess, starting with what we know about the family. Given the practice among London upper-class Jewish families of hiring private tutors for their children (Black 1998: 4), we may conjecture that Sarah probably enjoyed a not too bad general education, with rather limited Jewish content, at home under private tutors.

In 1814 or earlier Sarah married George Richardson Porter (Sraffa 1955: 60). The story that she 'married a school friend of her brothers' (Anonymous 1862) may be inaccurate, for she was the youngest in the family and the groom was two years younger than her. She was one of six among the Ricardo siblings who married outside the Jewish Community and we may assume that she became a member of the Church of England (Sraffa 1955: 54-61; Henderson 1994: 140). Her husband, born in London in 1792 and the son of a merchant, was employed for many years

with the Board of Trade statistical department, and became in 1841 one of the secretaries in the railway department. He had strong political opinions, those of a staunch liberal and enthusiastic free-trader, and was the author of several publications, including a renowned statistical overview of the British Society (Hewins 1959-60 [1882]; Waller 1877; McCulloch 1845: 80, 220, 222).<sup>1</sup> We are told by the *Gentleman's Magazine* that the Porters lived at Putney Heath in 1852 (Anonymous 1852), and that Sarah lived at West-hill, Wandsworth, when she died on 13 September 1862 (Anonymous 1862).

Not surprisingly, no entry is dedicated to her in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Instead, she is mentioned in an appendix to the entry on her husband as the author of *Conversations in Arithmetic* and two essays on educational issues, but ignores her novel, *Alfred Dudley* (Hewins 1959-60 [1882]: 178-9). In documenting her as a member of David Ricardo's family, Sraffa did not even report the titles of her several publications.<sup>2</sup> In his treatment of her, Henderson (1997: 140-41) was even more reticent, only informing us that she married outside the Jewish Community and that her place of burial is unknown. Ricardo's biographer, Weatherall (1976), ignored her completely. As a result, little is known of her private life other than she contracted a serious dermatological disease at the age of thirty-five (Ricardo to Mill, 30 December 1815, Ricardo 1951-73, 6: 309) and from her marriage bore four children, two sons and two daughters, one of whom was named Esther. Of her public life we know somewhat more, namely, that she actively participated in the Central Society for General Education and that she was the author of a novel, of a textbook on arithmetic and of two essays on education.

In this paper I discuss the contents of her novel, *Alfred Dudley*, in Section 2. In Section 3 I examine aspects of political economy illustrated in the novel. Then, in Section 4, I examine the moral lesson the novel is meant to convey, shown to be a less obvious one than those espoused by most Victorian novelists. Section 5 then considers the contents of her educational essays, arguing that they address the main issue on which the novel focuses, namely, the reasons for social evils and their possible treatment. Lastly, in Section 6, by way of conclusion I locate her views on the social questions of education, morality and religion in the context of British debate in the 1830s and 1840s.

## 2 *Alfred Dudley: The Novel*

While living the life of a middle-class married woman, Sarah became one of those literary ladies who brought a refreshing novelty to the nineteenth-century British intellectual world. Sarah's career started in 1830, at the age of forty, with a novel for children, *Alfred Dudley or the Australian Settlers*, published anonymously in accordance with the prevailing practice.<sup>3</sup> The book is the first novel for children about Australia. In fact, before it, there had been just Reverend John Adams's *Modern Voyages* (1790), which provides information about New South Wales and tells the story of early explorations and shipwrecks. Two years later, in 1832, an edifying short story appeared, namely 'The Happy Grandmother and her Grandchildren who Went to Australia', which at least tried to provide some fun by describing a tame young kangaroo's antics as a relief to Grandmother's moralising observations on how Divine Providence brought the family to such a happy land 'where clever, industrious and honest people can escape poverty and have a new start in life' (Prattle 1832).

Sarah's novel met with remarkable success, going through at least four editions. Indeed, it was not completely ignored by historians of literature, since the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* presents it as 'one of the earliest novels to feature Aboriginal characters'.<sup>4</sup> The plot in short is as follows: loss of land and wealth by a member of the gentry due to the sinister influence of a dishonest speculator; emigration to Australia as a choice of redemption with manual work; a hard choice faced by the eldest son between returning to England in order to inherit his uncle's estate together with membership in the house of the Lords and faithfulness to family and the new homeland; final denouement with an option for wealth without status and the virtuous investment of inherited wealth in a development project that will offer land and a home to destitute-but-honest members of the original English community while making room for a native tribe.

### 3 Political Economy in *Alfred Dudley*

A welcome development in recent years is the birth of scholarship on political economy in literature that has begun to analyse the presence of economic ideas in novels by authors such as Maria Edgeworth, Charles Dickens, Frances Trollope and Honoré de Balzac (Ingrao 2009). Sarah Ricardo's novel has not yet been considered in this literature. Besides being the work of a famous economist's sister, the novel represents a good example of this genre. In this regard women in political economy have recently been rediscovered (see Groenewegen 1994; Dimand, Dimand and Forget 1996).

Being the wife of a renowned statistician and the sister of one of the most famous political economists of the day no doubt shaped Sarah Ricardo's intellectual interests. Even though she was not an economist, these connections help account for her sensibility to social issues, and especially for the link between her treatment of economic topics in her novel and her contributions on education as a social issue. Besides, one more important connection is the probable acquaintance with Jane Haldimond Marcet, for which there are indirect proofs. This educated woman, Marcet, was married to a Swiss physician, and won great popularity with her first book, *Conversations on Chemistry* (1806), which aimed to simplify the subject of chemistry, then a leading natural science, for children. The success this book enjoyed encouraged her to undertake a similar enterprise in other sciences, the first of them being *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816). In this latter book Haldimond Marcet draws on basic ideas shared by a list of political economists, which in the 1827 edition was expanded to include, besides Adam Smith, Malthus, Say, Sismondi, also Ricardo and the less renowned William Blake, a former President of the Geological Society of London, member of the Political Economy Club and Ricardo's friend (Haldimond Marcet 1827: iv).<sup>5</sup> The Marcets used to promote social gatherings of the leading scientific thinkers of the time; whilst Mrs Marcet also had her own salon where women with intellectual interests met. Another figure in this social set is Maria Edgeworth, the renowned author of novels and short stories in which illustrations of Haldimond Marcet's economic notions are occasionally introduced, notably among Ricardo's friends. In addition, Delvalle Varley Lowry deserves mention, the Ricardo siblings' cousin, was the author of *Conversations on Mineralogy* (1826) joining in Marcet's enterprise. Sarah too apparently intended to join this enterprise with her book *Conversations on Arithmetic* (1835) and we may therefore suppose that Sarah was a regular attendee of Mrs Marcet's salon.

Several topics in *Alfred Dudley* directly relate to those elementary notions of political economy vulgarised by Haldimond Marcet in *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816). They include the causes of poverty, the principle of population as well as reference to the lamentable condition of workers in contemporary Britain, and the possibility of them attaining a respectable, virtuous and happy condition in a reformed society. It also alludes to classes as groups of individuals developing distinctive attitudes and peculiar vices, and treats speculation as the dark side of the commercial society, the ubiquitous enemy to the wise use of wealth. Another topic alluded to is the ambivalent relationship between wealth and happiness. The novel's message is, first, that the goal of a decent society may be more easily achieved in the new colonial settlements with manual work as the basis for a new way of living, and, second, that philanthropy by the upper-class and cooperation among labourers are the two elements of a strategy for achieving this goal. In what follows we shall examine these themes in more detail.

The first theme to be considered is poverty and its causes. Alfred, the novel's hero, intends to make the best of his inherited wealth in a humanitarian project, namely 'assisting to independence', people who, 'without their fault, had *sunk* into poverty' and who were 'well-educated, respectable persons, who should be *pressed down* by the *over-powering hand* of poverty, and struggling in vain to free themselves from its *iron grasp*'. (Ricardo Porter 1830: 179; **my emphasis**). They 'had seen better days, but, through the *fluctuations of trade* or other circumstances, had now become destitute – destitute even of the means of exile' (ibid; **my emphasis**). Let me clarify the metaphors employed here. Destitution is a sea where you may drown, and poverty is an entity with a hand that presses you down, holding you by an iron grasp. There is a *hand* at the core of the metaphorical secondary subject, echoing Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', but its action is less beneficial than it was supposed to be – at least to a point – by the Scottish political economist.<sup>6</sup> In connection to the causes of personal poverty there are a few explicit theoretical statements: poverty is caused (i) in the short run primarily by 'fluctuations of trade', (ii) by 'other circumstances' and (iii) in the long run by the principle of population. The idea of business cycles was a comparatively recent one, showing up in Robert Owen's *Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor* (1817) and in Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi's *Nouveaux Principes d'économie politique* (1819). The latter was in fact one of the six authorities in the 1827 edition of Haldimond Marcet's *Conversations in Political Economy*. From whom did Sarah Ricardo Porter learn about business cycles? Haldimond Marcet (1827: 415-28) refers to factors less climactic than Sismondi's cyclical crises, factors endogenous to the economy itself, namely, fluctuations in the price of corn caused by abundant or poor harvests made worse by agricultural protectionism. The 'fluctuations of trade' mentioned in Sarah's novel are, yet, not so clearly defined as to allow identification with Sismondi's cyclical crises. The other circumstances mentioned are those acknowledged by Smith, Malthus and Ricardo: wars, bad harvests, natural calamities, and besides – as the novel illustrates – misbehaviour by speculators and lack of wise administration of their own estates by members of the gentry.

The second theme is population, the long-run cause of poverty, an ever-active threat making any victory in the war on poverty a provisional and unstable one. As is well known, the articulation of the principle is found in Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1803). The principle was accepted by Ricardo, and is presented by Haldimond Marcet (1827: 142-61) as one of the central doctrines in

political economy. She illustrates Malthus's theory of population and its implications:

... in England, and all the old-established countries of Europe, the *population* has gradually increased till it has equalled the means of subsistence; and as Europe no longer affords the same facility for the growth of capital as a newly-settled country, if the *population* goes on augmenting, it may exceed the means of subsistence, and in that case the wages of labour will fall instead of rising, and the condition of the poor become very miserable. (Haldimond Marcet 1827: 146; **my emphasis**)

In *Alfred Dudley*, the hero manifests a belief that, his 'power of doing good' by means of his inherited wealth, 'may be more certain' in Australia 'than in an old and over-populated country' so that his humanitarian plan aims at offering destitute people the opportunity of 'settling in a country where they would not be *sunk* by any overgrowing population' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 176, 179).

The third theme is the role of different social classes and the positive or negative traits typical of them. The novel presents us with a description of economic actors from different groups. Among the characters in the novel there is the country gentleman, instantiated by Alfred Dudley's father, an educated, curious and open-minded person, with a quite liberal and generous attitude. This character 'took great delight in rural occupations, and in improving that domain which had descended to him from his fathers; while his cultivated mind and benevolent disposition made him respected and beloved by all who knew him' and his 'friends could always rely with unerring security on his advice and assistance' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 3). Yet he is characterised as somewhat naïve when it comes to practical affairs, particularly in financial matters, and prone to manipulation by callous and dishonest speculators. He 'was not a man of business, and did not exactly understand the responsibility he should incur by such an arrangement' (*ibid.*) as that proposed by a relative of his who turned out to be a speculator. This character appears to closely resemble Smith's description of the country gentleman (Smith 1976 [1776]: xi.a.1, ii.c.12-13, I.xi. p. 8; Cremaschi 2010: 30). Another character in the novel is the grandee, Alfred's uncle Sir Alfred Melville. He is a rather different character from that of the country gentleman. He is not devoid of any virtue, in so far as he has 'parsimonious habits', but he is prey to his own pride and seems to lack generosity and brotherly affection, displayed when 'he looked on with cold indifference' at the disaster befalling his sister's family (Ricardo Porter 1830: 2, 6). Sir Alfred also adheres stubbornly to received prejudice and is accordingly horrified at Alfred's choice of following his father to Australia, leaving the public school in England where he had been placed at his uncle's expense (*ibid.*: 9, 172). He takes revenge on Alfred for his lack of compliance by disinheriting him. Nonetheless, eventually 'his repugnancy to leave his property apart from his title had overcome all resentment towards Alfred, inducing him when dying to relent and make a will in his nephew's favor' (*ibid.*: 173). Then there is the speculator, a relative named Mr. —, the only totally negative character in the novel, 'who, conversant in mercantile pursuits, sought to induce his kind friend to enter with him into a banking concern in the neighbouring town' while professing 'to require nothing from Mr. Dudley but the use of his name, which would at once give character and stability to the establishment' (*ibid.*: 3). As it transpires in the story, Alfred's father is informed only after a few months that the bank had ceased

business and his partner, the speculator, 'seeing the most extensive ruin inevitable', had fled after having 'been secretly speculating to a large amount' (*ibid.*: 5). The speculator's description faithfully follows Adam Smith's description of the 'projector', that dangerous individual addicted to speculation who 'promises himself extraordinary profits' and in whose 'golden dreams' has 'the most distinct vision of this great profit' (Smith 1976 [1776]: 46, 69). In Smith's view, the proliferation of speculators is one among several undesirable side effects of commercial society since they 'are trading not with any capital of their own, but with the capital which [the banker] advances to them', a capital which those projectors had 'very artfully contrived to draw from those banks, not only without their knowledge or deliberate consent, but for some time, perhaps, without their having the most distant suspicion that they had really advanced it' (Smith 1976 [1776]: 71, 72; Cremaschi 2010: 30). There is also the character of the settler, adopted by Alfred's father in his new life. This character has the virtues of the country gentleman combined with newly found qualities of thrift, parsimony, commitment to hard manual work, and the ability to adapt to a novel and difficult situation. Then there is the native in the novel, represented by Mickie, a younger boy who becomes Alfred's humble servant. In character, Mickie constantly calls Alfred '*massa*' [that is, master] and easily learns the Port Jackson Pidgin English knowing that there is no duty on the settler's side to learn his native language (Ricardo Porter 1830: 52). He is friendly, helpful and, if not really clever, at least 'shrewd' (*ibid.*).

The fourth theme is the condition of labourers. It is well known that for Adam Smith the liberal reward of labour was, from a moral point of view, an unconditional goal and, in terms of national interest, was the main element of one nation's wealth. For Malthus and Ricardo such a desirable goal as higher wages was tricky to attain by reason of the combined action of the principle of population and the decreasing productivity of land. Yet, it is clear enough that Malthus's policy advice aimed at fighting poverty more effectively and that, at least from 1819 onwards, Ricardo too was increasingly aware of the rather wide room left for action aimed at improving the labourers' lot (Cremaschi 2014: 157-65). Haldimond Marcet offered a faithful version of Malthus's view on the means for improving the condition of labourers when she wrote of giving:

... the rising generation such an education as would render them not only moral and religious, but industrious, frugal, and provident [...] Education gives rise to prudence, not only by enlarging our understandings, but by softening our feelings, by humanising the heart, and promoting amiable affections. The rude and inconsiderate peasant marries without either foreseeing or caring for the miseries he may entail on his wife and children; but he who has been taught to value the comforts and decencies of life, will not heedlessly involve himself and all that is dear to him in poverty. (Haldimond Marcet 1827: 168)

She avowedly echoes Malthus's description of the goal of his own war on poverty, namely 'promoting circumstances that would tend to elevate the character of the lower classes of society', so that their members could no more 'acquiesce patiently in the thought of depriving themselves and their children of the means of being respectable, virtuous and happy' (Malthus 1820: 251).<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, in Ricardo Porter's novel, Alfred's concern in the novel is the '*independent and dignified* condition of the lower classes' (*ibid.*: 183).

The fifth theme is emigration as a means of mending the social evils brought about by overpopulation. Organised emigration of an excess population had become a cherished project for social reformers of different kinds, from Gilbert Wakefield to the Benthamites. Even Malthus admits emigration among the possible remedies for poverty in the last editions of his *Essay*. Haldimond Marcet voiced this opinion when writing:

Emigration is undoubtedly a resource for an overstocked population; but one which is adopted in general, not only with great reluctance by individuals, but is commonly discouraged by governments, from a mistaken apprehension of its diminishing the strength of the country. (Haldimond Marcet 1827: 165)<sup>8</sup>

In *Alfred Dudley* Alfred's project was to obtain a considerable grant of land in Australia, to 'divide it into many moderate-sized locations, and to invite from the parent country, settlers to these among well-educated, respectable persons' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 179). The emigration program contemplated by Alfred was to be characterised by *mutuality* in which a loan amount was granted for emigration to be repaid later by the emigrant. In this way the original capital in the program would be returned enabling it to assist a multitude to emigrate over time. From his recently inherited wealth he intended 'to afford there every facility for emigration, and to advance a sum of money to each sufficient for the requisite previous expenses; which sum should either be returned to him by instalments, or paid back by an equivalent rent, just as it might best suit the views of the settler; while the money thus returned would again assist others in a similar manner' (*ibid.*: 180). The plan was essentially similar to how Friendly Societies operated, whose activity was illustrated by Haldimond Marcet (1827: 171) in describing how their members could 'accumulate a fund which furnishes them relief and aid in times of sickness or distress'.

The sixth theme is wealth in its relationship with happiness. The notion that happiness is independent of wealth was emphasised by Adam Smith and then advocated by Malthus. Yet both writers were clear that the satisfaction of basic needs is a necessary precondition for any happiness. Haldimond Marcet considered the issue by similar thinking. While answering the objection that 'to be rich seems to be the great aim of political economy, whilst religion and morality teach us that we should moderate the thirst of gain', she observes that 'the richest people are not always the happiest' and that 'wealth is not sufficient to constitute the happiness of a people', but is just 'one among a number of causes' (*ibid.*: 24). She singles out the sources of 'social happiness' to be 'a pure religion, good morals, a wise government, and a general diffusion of knowledge' (*ibid.*). In Ricardo Porter's *Alfred Dudley*, wealth is a blessing that can be put to use for the common benefit, but comes with it heavy responsibility. It may become a source of real happiness for the individual when it is accompanied by virtue. Happiness requires first of all warm family relations and friendship; and a decent social order is a first step toward the diffusion of happiness among individuals. The members of the Dudley family, soon after losing all their property including their home:

... were astonished how soon their minds had accommodated themselves to circumstances, and how much of content and cheerfulness already surrounded them. They were still a happy family, and were pleased to find that this happiness did not depend on adventitious circumstances. (Ricardo Porter 1830: 8-9)

At the end of the novel, when a new home has been successfully built for the family in a new country, they realise how wealth may provide comfort up to a point, after which its effect on happiness begins to decline. The author comments that, since the hero was living already ‘in comparative affluence and comfort, his wealth could but little increase the enjoyments of his family and himself’ (*ibid.*: 178). This echoes a well-known remark by Adam Smith that ‘The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity [...] they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements’ (Smith 1980 [1759]: 10). Taking care directly of those members of the lower classes for whom he had an opportunity to care is not just a source of authentic pleasure but also in the interest of Alfred Dudley *qua* member of the ‘upper class’, for ‘the prosperity of his tenantry must be the ultimate prosperity of himself’ (Ricardo Porter 1830: 183).

#### 4 The Novel’s Moral Tale

The nineteenth-century novel typically espoused a moral tale. Maria Edgeworth, for example, confessed that only in her last novel, *Helen*, did she go to ‘much pains’ to avoid incorporating an explicit moral tale into the story being ‘sensible of the inconvenience’ of this both to reader and writer (Edgeworth 1834). It must be said that in the case of literature for children, where *Alfred Dudley* clearly belongs, a moral was a must. Paternalistic as it is, the moral tale is less philistine than it may sound to our ears. Indeed, in its insistence on manual work, education for all classes, and equality between different ‘races’ it could sound even subversive to the ears of traditionalist parents. It may be summarised in seven claims.

The first is that the character of a philanthropist represents the greatest calling for a human being. In the conclusion of *Alfred Dudley* the hero’s ‘benevolent mind’ is described as ‘delighted in planning vast schemes for removing a portion of human misery’. In his mother’s words, the condition of life he has chosen, namely that of ‘the benefactor of his species’, is the happiest and most valuable (Ricardo Porter 1830: 192).

The second is the already mentioned claim that happiness is independent of external circumstances, and of wealth. The only additional source of happiness, after basic needs are satisfied, is benevolence. Once a certain amount of comfort is granted, happiness can no more be increased by additional enjoyment of material goods. The only multiplier of wealth’s capacity of producing happiness is the fact of ‘being expended in the blessed office of doing good to others’ (*ibid.*: 178). This is a task performed through ‘judicious benevolence’. It is this attitude ‘which had converted so large a mass of misery and privation into so vast a sum of human happiness now collected around him [...] the extension of which appeared to have no other boundary than the immense sea-girt tract of land which they inhabited’ (*ibid.*: 192). One essential dimension in happiness is its relational quality; that is, there is a mirroring effect acting as a multiplier for anybody’s happiness. Thus, friendly relations are one of its basic ingredients. The hero ‘was more than ever convinced that the interchange of affection and kindly feelings is necessary to the happiness of man’ (*ibid.*: 110). And the author comments in the epigraph to chapter 14:

[...] joy that is unshared,  
Is scarcely joy; but all its bliss imparts



Soon as partaken by congenial hearts

(Ricardo Porter 1830: 141).

The third claim in the novel is that status is a highly ambivalent gift and should be forfeited without afterthought for acquiring more substantial things. Higher status is constantly at a risk of carrying misery. The pleasure of being admired, revered and noticed, one of the human drives that Adam Smith placed at the centre of social life, is a mixed blessing. It is essentially an alternative benefit to more basic pleasures such as those of affectionate family relations and friendship as well as of judicious benevolence. Alfred's choice for wealth without status is prompted by a desire to keep his family life alive as well as to enjoy the challenge and rewards of his own humanitarian project (Ricardo Porter 1830: 187-92).

The fourth claim is that poverty may be, among other causes, the consequence of vice. And, since vice is contagious and war on poverty is an educational no less than a political and economic enterprise, segregation of the vicious poor is a preliminary measure. Hence, in *Alfred Dudley*, the hero recruits tenants from his family's former estate in England, readily accepting all those who had been reduced to poverty 'through misfortune; but steadily rejecting the idle and the vicious' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 185).

The fifth claim is that manual work is no less dignified than any other employment. For the upper classes manual work may be more a blessing than a curse, allowing the development of physical and moral discipline as well as the acquisition of orderly mental habits, experience-based knowledge and improved judgement. This is illustrated in the novel by the transformation Dudley, the father, undergoes, from an educated and generous country gentleman with little practical experience and judgement to that of a judicious man who combines education with practical experience. A corollary is that intellectual improvement is a necessity for every rank. Alfred, after leaving school in order to join his father on the voyage to Australia, was constantly employed as a manual worker, and yet his 'books were a never-failing resource. He felt that literature and science, under every circumstance, have attractions; and that their cultivation is as necessary to the happiness of the solitary settler of Australia, as it is to the respectability of the independent gentleman of England' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 110).

The sixth claim in *Alfred Dudley* is that coexistence of different 'races' may prove peaceful and friendly. This is a theme peculiar to this novel. Soon after their arrival, Alfred shows his own peaceful intentions to the local tribe by offering assistance to an aboriginal woman whom he meets in the bush with her baby and unable to walk after an accident and carries her back by horse to her village. From this time 'there was constant friendly intercourse between the Dudleys and the natives, which proved extremely advantageous to the former, as their able friends were always glad to be employed, and thought themselves amply rewarded for their services by receiving a small piece of tobacco, some biscuit, some sugar, or some corn-meal; in return they very often brought a large basket of fish' (Ricardo Porter 1830: 54). As already mentioned, between Alfred and Mickie, the poor woman's older son, a friendly relationship develops and the author describes Mickie's wild expressions of enthusiasm on Alfred's return from England (*ibid.*: 188). It is true that the relationship, far from being symmetric, is a heavily paternalistic one. Nevertheless, at the new town church 'there was the school, in which the white and black children were, without any distinction, admitted' (*ibid.*: 190).

## 5 The Making of Reasonable Creatures

A few years after the novel, Sarah published her textbook, *Conversations in Arithmetic* (1835),<sup>9</sup> which, as discussed above, imitated Haldimond Marcet's and Varley Lowry's *Conversations*. The exposition of this textbook is in the form of a dialogue between teacher and a pupil named Alfred Dudley, which was Sarah's way of taking advantage of her novel's success. The Preface explains that 'the form of conversation has been chosen, since it affords a greater facility for explanation and familiar illustration than any other' (Ricardo-Porter 1835: vii). A second edition was published with the title *Rational Arithmetic*, restyled as a textbook for class-room work. The preface to this second edition states that 'to rescue arithmetic from the degraded rank it at present occupies among intellectual pursuits is a principal object of the following work' (Ricardo Porter 1852: v). It is claimed that mathematics is a major tool for teaching children the art of reasoning. Quoting John Locke, she argues that no other subject is:

... so admirably adapted to call forth and strengthen the reasoning powers [...] If its end and aim were only to exercise their mental faculties, the time thus employed in the education of youth would be well bestowed, 'not so much to make them mathematicians as to make them reasonable creatures. (*ibid.*: v)<sup>10</sup>.

Quoting Locke once more, the Preface insists on a need for 'gradual growth in knowledge' and to avoid starting with definitions (*ibid.*: viii). On its novel approach to teaching:

... [the] 'manner in which it is here proposed that arithmetic should be taught differs materially from the usual practice [...] I have as far as possible avoided giving any rule, without first having clearly explained to the pupil, wherefore the method is followed, or on what principle the rule is founded ... [it] should never usurp the place of reasons, and particular cases should not be confounded with general principles. (*ibid.*: viii)

The aim of such a process is that of preparing children 'for those difficult and knotty parts of knowledge which try the strength of thought' (*ibid.*). In the first part of the textbook, the learning plan includes notation and numeration, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and method of proof. The second part includes signs and properties of numbers, fractions, and decimals; whilst the third part, remarkably, deals with commercial arithmetic, covering such subjects as interest, insurance, commission, discount; and the fourth part deals with more advanced mathematics, including arithmetical progression, geometrical proportion and progression, square measure, square and cube root.

The general state of education in England was a matter of serious concern in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Besides primary schools run under the aegis of the Church of England and of Dissenting congregations, there was a wide range of privately-run common schools for the middle class, while for the upper-class offspring the tradition of domestic education was still prevailing. Several experiments were run in this time for providing decent primary school education to working class children, among them Richard Owen's in Lanark and Susanna Corder's at Stoke Newington (Sutherland 1990: 119-37; Soloway 1969: 390-430; Gillard 2011, ch. 2). Projects for a national system of education for all classes were

discussed and Lord Brougham was the promoter of a bill to ensure state support for a national system of primary schools. The proposal was sunk not so much by opposition to devoting a huge amount of public funds to the scheme, but on the questions of what kind of religious education would be imparted in such a school system and who was to be in control of it (Pollard 1956: 158-72; Curtis and Boulwood 1960: 56-8). Brougham tried vainly to appease opposition from all sides with a compromise along the lines of the system of national education adopted in the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup>

The *National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church* was founded in 1811 as a Church semi-official organ, with the aim of providing a school in every parish. Its program consisted of teaching the four 'R's'; that is, besides *reading*, '*riting*', '*rithmetic* ~~and~~ adding *religion*'. The *British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion* was founded by liberal Anglicans with some Roman Catholics and Jews, following the example provided by Quaker Joseph Lancaster, the founder of an experimental school. Besides the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic, its program included the teaching of scripture and Christian doctrine in a non-denominational form. The *Central Society of Education* was founded in 1836 by a minority group of liberals and radicals, including fifty MPs, who were inspired by the ideas of Swiss educators Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg (1771–1844) in promoting a secular system of education. This society had a short life, being dissolved after a campaign of attacks by the Bishop of London and other Anglican authorities in 1838 (Pollard, 1956: 198-200; Stewart and McCann 1967: 136-54; Parkin 1975; Gillard 2011, ch. 2). Among its life-members there was Sarah Ricardo Porter along with her brothers Ralph and Samson; in addition, brothers Moses and Francis and her husband were regular members.

Sarah in fact contributed to two volumes published by the Society. In 'On Infant Schools for the upper and middle classes' (1838), she quotes Locke on education to the effect that virtue and control over the passions are not a subject for theoretical instruction but should be learnt rather through everyday-life experience (Locke 1693: 83, 148). She also makes the comment in the essay that 'it is beneficial to young children to be encouraged and assisted by example; it is as well that they should never be left alone, and that they should congregate together with those of their own age and joyous nature; their sympathies are thus early awakened, and selfishness is not allowed to take root' (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1838]: 238). Sarah expressed her support for school education for middle-class children, arguing that what is good for children from lower classes should be good for all children, and points to the example of the Stoke Newington School established by a renowned Quaker educationist, Susanna Corder. She also contends that the development of the imagination ought to play a primary role in school education, thus contradicting the notorious educational credo professed by Thomas Gradgrind, Dickens's Benthamite principal, who proclaimed 'Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts' (Dickens 1854: 9). Instead she maintains that 'the teaching of facts is made too much an all-important feature [...] Children should be rather encouraged to show their own ingenuity and contrivance in different games' (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1838]: 236).

On the issue of religious education, Sarah suggests that the dilemma of different denominations may be more fictional than real. She again points to the example of

the Stoke Newington School where the children of Anglicans, Quakers, Independents and Unitarians all attend and yet 'the Christian religion is taught to all the children in a manner approved of by all the parents. There is, then, a common ground on which children of all denominations may meet, and learn Christianity and brotherly love at the same time' (*ibid.*: 238).

The same issues in education are also discussed by Sarah in her essay contribution to the second of the two volumes published by *Central Society of Education* in 1840, entitled 'The expediency and the means of elevating the profession of the educator in public estimation'. The essay starts with an acknowledgment of what appears to be at least *prima facie* the 'great and striking advance which has taken place in the moral tone of society' (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1840]: 435). It then sets out to enquire 'whether this apparently rapid progress be perfectly sound and healthy' and whether it is directed along 'that higher path of improvement which leads to lasting good' (*ibid.*: 435). In this light Sarah asked whether 'regarding with too great complacency the general condition of society as outwardly presented, we have neglected to study the character of the individual members of which that society is composed' (*ibid.*: 436). Perhaps not surprisingly, this question was addressed by her husband, George Porter in *The Progress of the Nation*, where he remarked that, as regards personal morals:

... there is at least a greater amount of decency than formerly – that profligacy does not stalk abroad in the face of days as shamelessly as it was wont to do, and that brutality has, in a very great degree, ceased to obtain the countenance of the educated classes. There is, it is true, much yet to be done in this direction, while in the higher branches of morals we have almost everything to learn. With the self-denying doctrines of Christianity upon our lips, we present a practical denial of them in our lives. (Porter 1836-8, 2: 688)

Sarah seems to agree, but she adds also that the undeniable progress in *civility* does not immediately assure progress in *morality*. She admits that 'it is only the public opinion which is the restraining power' and 'the character is more hedged in and restrained by the greater degree of conventional propriety and morality of the present day' (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1840]: 437), but she also complains of 'a dearth of original thought, an absence of lofty modes of action among the many' and regrets that 'duties of usefulness to others and of improving their own faculties are disregarded' while disinterested 'enquiries after truth for the sake of truth, uninfluenced by any previously adopted bias, are rarely if ever pursued' (*ibid.*: 436-7). This seems to echo – albeit with no reference – a famous remark by Kant, namely that we 'are *cultivated* in a high degree by art and science. We are *civilized*, perhaps to the point of being overburdened, by all sorts of social decorum and propriety. But very much is still lacking before we can be held to be already *moralized*. For the idea of morality still belongs to culture...' (Kant 1784: 116; **my emphasis**). She adds in fact, in a spirit close to Kant's, that the 'reflecting few' who believe in the necessity of 'a higher morality than that which satisfies general opinion' are bound to rely on the force provided by public opinion, and society is indebted for its progress to those, who 'by slow degrees silently and almost imperceptibly work the change' (*ibid.*). From this standpoint she argues that 'the expediency then of raising the class of educators must be manifest' (*ibid.*: 438) pointing at the exemplary experiences of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Philip Emanuel von Fellenberg as a proof of the fact that 'systems' alone are not enough

in order to shape characters and what is required instead is the educator as a living personality.<sup>12</sup> In this connection, Sarah argued that hindrances to the growth of a body of competent and dedicated educators lie, first, in 'want of respect' for teachers on the part of society as a whole and, secondly, in 'want of independence of character and of high moral dignity on the part of the educator' (*ibid.*: 450).

At the end of the 1840 essay, Sarah again addresses the issue of religious education (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1840]: 519-27). On the topic of moral education she quotes approvingly William Whewell's statement that 'though man may do evil, he cannot knowingly approve of it. On this tribunal, on this sanctuary, we may well look with admiration and reverence' (Whewell 1837: 47). She comments that a sense of duty, not the search for happiness, should be the focus of moral education and that conscience is a tribunal created by God in the human heart (Ricardo Porter 1968 [1840]: 518-19). Furthermore, she argues that in teachers' seminaries 'it is still more essential than in any other schools that religious principle should be the basis of all education' but the question is 'how can this best be accomplished, consistently with perfect tolerance and freedom of opinion?' (*ibid.*: 519). She admits that 'the question is indeed most difficult of solution' but points to Prussia, Holland and at the schools of the British and Foreign School Society as examples of having 'children of different denominations educated in one seminary in religious principles, and in perfect harmony' (*ibid.*: 520-1). Sarah concludes from these experiences that difficulties of different religious denominations can be overcome by three different methods. The first is 'pursuing the general education independent of religious instruction', leaving it 'to [be] supplied by a separate instruction' (*ibid.*: 525). The second is 'separate denominational education, that is, the establishment of schools for each different sect' (*ibid.*). The third is minimal religious education, or 'teaching the great principles of religion, the instructing generally in the Scriptures, and cultivating religious feeling as the basis of education in the schools, leaving it to parents, or to religious guides, to instil into the children the particular creed which they profess' (*ibid.*). She acknowledges that the three modes 'are all open, more or less, to some objection', and suggests that the three options be examined by a committee of 'pious and enlightened characters' (*ibid.*) of different sects:

... who would conduct their enquiries with the calmness of philosophers and the charity of Christians; and who would at length teach us what other nations have so long practised – that it is possible to have an established religion combined with perfect religious toleration, and with Christian religious education for the whole of the people. (*ibid.*: 527)

## 6 Conclusion

There are major issues arising from Sarah Ricardo Porter's writings which are of particular interest to the political economist. The first is connected with nineteenth-century debate on slavery and colonisation. From 1783, the year when the first petition to abolish the slave trade was presented to parliament by Quaker-led antislavery committees, to 1833, the year of abolition of slavery in the British Colonies, public debate over slavery was highly animated in Britain. As is well known, the decisive contribution to abolishing slavery was William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament and leading figure in the evangelical Clapham Sect. An obstacle to abolition was the reality that the triangular trade of slave and colonial goods between Africa, America and Britain made up some eighty per cent of her

total foreign trade in the late eighteenth century. Projects for the colonisation of Canada, Australia and New Zealand were conceived as a way of developing the economies of colonies as an alternative to that based on plantations and slave labour. The broad idea was that in these colonies agriculture would depend on independent farmers and provide a supply of raw materials to Europe. At the same time these colonies would be an outlet for the emigration of those made poor in Britain by population pressures and economic crises. Sarah's novel, *Alfred Dudley*, reflects much of this thinking and the morality behind it. When interpreted *pragmatically* and not merely in a semantic way, a radical streak is indeed detected in some of her views on the subject (Dascal 1989; Dascal and Cremaschi 1999). There is for example the following poetic comment:

Who, looking through the Ethiop's darkened skin,  
Could see a brother in the man within

(Ricardo Porter 1830: 188).

The message conveyed here to the reader through an apparent slip of the pencil – an Ethiop is an African, not an Australian native – makes one wonder whether the message British readers got from this couple of ugly verses in 1830 was different from that which a naïve reader may get today.

The second issue relates to the debate, dating back at least to Montesquieu, on wealth and virtue. The early nineteenth-century and post-Malthusian debate was much focused on the question of urban poverty. Haldimond Marcet confidently rejected the objection that the moral drawback of the rise of manufacturing and urbanisation outweighed its material advantages by arguing that 'there are often a greater number of people collected together in a manufacturing town than there are scattered over a space of thirty square miles of country: were their morals, therefore, the same, vice would appear much more conspicuous in the town than in the country' (Haldimond Marcet 1827: 84). She added that the 'coarse and uncultivated feelings' of a viciously inclined peasant refrain him less than the 'more developed mind of the vicious townsman' from the most vicious kinds of crime (*ibid.*). She outlined the ideal of 'labouring classes' as those who were 'comparatively cleanly, industrious, sober, frugal, respecting themselves, and respected by others' (*ibid.*: 171). Indeed, Malthus (1820: 251) had written, four years after the first edition of Haldimond Marcet's *Conversations* and ten years before *Alfred Dudley*, that his goal was a state where members of the 'lower classes of society' would become as prudent as possible, and accordingly 'respectable, virtuous and happy'. Sarah's husband, George Porter (1847: 638), wrote seventeen years after the publication of *Alfred Dudley* that 'the demoralizing tendency of riches has ever been a favourite theme for declamation with poets and moralists [...] the evils and the wealth have increased together, they must necessarily be considered as cause and effect'. He added:

... a great part of the moral evil under which societies are suffering is the offspring of ignorance, and [...] without insisting upon any very high degree of perfectibility in human nature, we may reasonably hope that the removal of that ignorance will do much towards restoring moral health to communities, and thus fit them for the rational enjoyment of blessings so increasingly offered for their acceptance. (*ibid.*: 639)

And twelve years on, George Porter commented that communism is a dangerous doctrine because of its heavy moral demand on people. He made the obvious objection that, once the required amount of virtue is achieved, any drastic change in the structure of society would become superfluous, and its advocates 'while insisting on the *rights* of man, forget his weakness and his vices, and build up a state of society in which each must of necessity be virtuous and self-denying, or the whole fabric would at once fall to pieces; let each individual exercise the same virtues in the present state of society which would be required in their Utopia, then misery would vanish' (Porter 1859: 58). The lesson from *Alfred Dudley* seems to be the same: one individual's virtue may open up a perspective of being *virtuous*, *respectable*, and *happy* for a multitude. This lesson is argued in a more sophisticated way in Sarah's 1840 essay on education. As previously referred to, Sarah argues that concomitance of wealth and vice is no proof of a causal relationship between each other, something of which both her friend Haldimond Marcet and her husband George Porter were well aware. They were also aware that a dialectical, or almost tragic relationship exists between civilisation, made possible by the 'progress of wealth', and moralisation, made possible by education which, in turn, is a blessing availed by wealth, but not necessarily a side effect of the former.

The third issue of interest is how far our understanding of Sarah's ideas may shed some light on those of her brother, David Ricardo, and how her brother's ideas may have influenced what she wrote. I have shown above how her novel illustrates a handful of notions from Political Economy, the same as had been illustrated in Haldimond Marcet's *Conversations* and revived in Edgeworth's novels and short stories. There is no direct reference to David Ricardo in the novel, which is hardly surprising, and also his doctrines do not seem to play a role. Yet, it is well known that the third edition of the *Principia* provided an occasion for James Mill's complaint of an alleged betrayal of the cause of Political Economy, and it may be surmised that the latter was becoming less and less dogmatic about a coincidence between the workings of economic laws and the promotion of general happiness (Cremaschi 2004).

The fourth issue of interest is toleration. As a Jewish-born Christian (probably Anglican), Ricardo Porter saw no conflict in being both *religious* and *liberal*. Indeed, as previously indicated she readily quoted William Whewell approvingly, the most respected intellectual authority from the establishment, whilst supporting the set of progressive values fostered by the anti-establishment new British elite, consisting of a rather assorted alignment of urban middle-class Quakers, Unitarians and Evangelicals. Sometimes allied with Roman Catholics and Utilitarians, this liberal movement fought and won first the anti-slavery battle and a number of other campaigns, from religious toleration to Irish emancipation and extension of the electoral franchise. These progressive social objectives were philanthropy, education for all, cooperation between social classes, the dignity of manual work, and peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups. Sarah's proposals are those of a religious liberal to achieve moral and religious education for children from different religious nominations. The proposal stems from a belief in toleration, together with a sincere belief religion as basis for morality.

The fifth issue is Ricardo Porter's 'fortune', or more precisely submergence, and the relationship between her own work and her brother's. Not unlike those of many other women who are less known to posterity than their male contemporaries, I would suggest that Sarah's biography and intellectual activity may help in shedding some light on the context of her older brother's intellectual career. Due

allowance has to be made for a different age, different intellectual interests, difference in, or lack of, professional experience, and even partly different religious affiliations, but also due attention has to be paid to their closeness in terms of shared social networks and social, moral and religious agendas. It is as well to keep in mind that when David Ricardo published his *Principles*, his sister was already an adult with a decent education, married to another political economist and with connections with other female intellectuals. Thus, what we know now about her, besides being of interest in itself, may help also in shedding light on Ricardo's intellectual career. But the most striking fact is that just being a *sister* implied handicaps resulting in one more astonishing *damnatio capitis* in the history of women.

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## Notes

- 1 See also Porter, G.R. (1836-38; 1830; 1833); and F. Bastiat (1849).
- 2 Of her, Sraffa wrote:

Sarah. B. 22 Dec 1790. She is best known under her married name of Mrs. Porter as a writer on educational subjects (Her works are listed in the brief article on her in the Dictionary of National Bibliography). She married in 1814 or earlier George Richardson Porter (1792-1852). F.R.S., author of *The Progress of the Nation*, 1834 and frequently reprinted; he became joint Secretary of the Board of Trade, having established its statistical department in 1834, and was one of the founders of the Statistical Society and a member of the Political Economy Club, 1840-1852. Of their marriage there were two sons and two daughters. She died at West Hill, Wandsworth, on 13 Sept. 1862 (1955: 60).

- 3 Authorship may be established through reference made to it in the title-page of *Conversations in Arithmetic*. Indeed the novel has been catalogued by several libraries under Sarah Porter's name. There are 11 matches for *Alfred Dudley* in The British Union Catalogue, most of them from the first edition of 1830, one from the second 1836 edition and another from the 1859 edition. Among them, three are attributed to Sarah Porter. The Australian National Library owns two exemplars, one from the first edition and another from one dated 1842. Both records declare: 'Authorship uncertain. Has been attributed to William Howitt, or Mrs. G.R. (Sarah) Porter. Cf. Ferguson addenda (no. 1313)' (Australian National Library Catalogue; Ferguson 1986). The *Bibliography of Australian Literature* repeats that William Howitt may have been the co-author according to Ferguson (1941-69, no. 3342). The attribution seems to depend on a handwritten note by a previous owner on one of two copies owned by the Australian National Library with no proof given in support of this conjecture. The reason may be that *Alfred Dudley* was mistaken for *A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia* (Howitt 1854). As a consequence, the novel has been mentioned a couple of times in histories of literature as a work by one Sarah Porter, never identified with



Ricardo's sister, at least until the *Oxford Dictionary of Biography* put things straight (Drain 2004).

4 The summary of the novel provided stated: 'Alfred Dudley, successful in acquiring wealth in the colony, attempts to reconstruct in the Antipodes the lost family estate of Dudley Park in England', with the comment that Dudley's inclusion of the Aborigines in the transplanted English community 'reveals an early, and rare, spark of optimism in fiction about the possible union of the two races' (Wilde, Horton and Andrews 1994: 2; Hunt 1995: 323).

5 In the 1816 edition the list was confined to Smith, Malthus, Say, Sismondi (Haldimond Marcet 1816: vii).

6 For the claim that the metaphor was for Adam Smith not theological or providentialist, and neither an expression of outright optimism, see Cremaschi 2002.

7 This passage from Malthus is quoted extensively in the 1827 edition of *Conversations on Political Economy* (see Haldimond Marcet 1827: 160-1).

8 This passage was already there in the first edition (Haldimond Marcet 1816: 155) but the word 'mistaken' was added in following editions.

9 Note that the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Anonymous 1852) lists among George Porter's own works also Sarah's *Conversations in Arithmetic*.

10 The quote in the passage is from the 'Conduct of the Understanding' (Locke 1706: 220).

11 It involved that 'all teachers be members of the Established Church and that the vicar of each parish be given the authority not merely to examine all schools under his jurisdiction likewise to determine the type of instruction they gave [...] no form of worship be allowed in school save the Lord's Prayer and that religious teaching be confined to passages of Holy Writ' (Pollard 1956: 166).

12 On the introduction of Pestalozzi's and Fellenberg's ideas to England see Pollard (1956: 23-52) and Stewart and McCann (1967: 136-54). These were known primarily through several reports published by British visitors to their educational establishments, but also something of Pestalozzi's writings had been made accessible to the English reader (Pestalozzi 1800; 1810; 1818; 1827).

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